

Industrial Relations Department
Monthly Report for December, 1947

TO: George H. Robinson
Executive Secretary

FROM: Roy E. Norris
Industrial Relations Secretary

Educational Relations with Employers: The Christmas season gave us a good chance to look for specific indications of how thorough our work has been toward the integration of Negroes in sales forces of the Department stores that have gone along with us to date. Michael's, Bamberger's and Ohrbach's, respectively, responded to our stimuli with respect to ceasing to exclude Negroes from sales positions. The special hiring in these stores for Christmas, 1947, included a few Negroes, but more than at any other time in the past. Actual spot-checks made disclosed the heartening sight of Negro sales clerks going about their work "just like old troupers".

Though the small number of Negroes hired as sales clerks is indeniably out of proportion to Negroes interested, available, qualified for, and asking for such work, those few actually employed prove that we are doing the right job in an efficient and skillful kind of way. For instance, the majority of girls involved were accepted by employment interviewers in the respective stores, without referrals from us or any other specific organization. They were selected from among the large number of Negro and white girls applying on their own initiative. It should not be any more necessary for Negro girls to get outside influence to secure work, than it is for the general population.

Efforts were continued to assure the development of some Negro machinists. During December, representatives of the Union locals at Worthington Pump & Machinery Corp., Driver Harris, Crucible Steel, and Hyatt Roller Bearing Div. of General Motors, were talked with toward that end. No tangible progress can be reported as yet.

With officials of Western Electric, your Secretary pressed what was admittedly to them a new concept in employee-employer relations. The Urban League had before it the case of a girl who was fired because of absenteeism after 5 years of continuous employment at Western Electric. Investigations of both the Urban League and of the company disclosed a great difference between the attitude of the supervisor toward the girl in question and the attitude toward other workers. The Urban League representative pointed out that the nervous condition of the girl (which even normally affects her ability to speak) was aggravated by the supervisor's lack of supervisory relationship; and that this aggravated condition was responsible for a substantial measure of the very bad attendance record. We pointed out our hesitance to open a case on behalf of an employee with such a record, but that the record could not be accepted as a determining factor since it was partly caused by the supervisor himself.

In some circles this position will be challenged energetically. However, it is your Secretary's considered judgment that it is fair, and has a background of cases to prove the necessity for pressing it.

Community Relations: We are continuing to get cooperation from the State C.I.O. office, and two of its committees, on our white collar job project. A conference held during December went into the matter of the use of Negroes as reporters, and other white collar workers in the newspaper companies in northern New Jersey. Apparently, the Newspaper Guild, C.I.O., is not yet wed to the proposition of aiding in developing actual success. It is claimed that the "rank and file" object. We are planning to meet with a selected number of publishers, nevertheless, and simultaneously satisfy the rank and file of the Newspaper Guild that the introduction of Negroes would not jeopardize their individual job security.

Attendance at the State CIO Convention and the utilization of voiced invitations to sit in on some caucuses as well as the general sessions, rewarded us with some new allies. At least one misunderstanding was cleared up also: Officers of one Union had become angered with the Urban League because it had not sought this union's help and confidence while it (the Urban League) was doing some work on internal problems in a certain plant. However, the Urban League had been asked by management for help on specific personnel problems. The Urban League Secretary surveyed the problems and the plant, and among tentative recommendations to Management, pointed out that a more thorough exploration be made, with the Urban League Secretary contacting whoever or whatever groups within the plant, it felt necessary for a good job. Management accepted the tentative recommendation but was not interested in having the matter take on broader aspects. In other words, the Urban League Secretary was in the plant at the request of Management, on a specific problem, but was not interested in the thorough job needed since it would include the Union.

The Union official apologized to the Urban League in the presence of a large number of other officials and rank and file delegates. A new warmth for the integrity of the Urban League was realized.

Other community work involved work with: The Y.W.C.A.; the Essex County Intergroup Council, the Industrial Council of Urban Leagues and Similar Agencies, with the Council for Fair Employment in Smaller Retail Stores (including a promise to your Secretary by the manager of the store, to hire Negro sales clerks in the F.W. Grand, Inc. 5-10-25¢ store); the Consumers League and on the Household Employment Program.

Employment: As in previous months the total number of referrals continues to drop. This is not because of a diminished need of jobs, but because of a lack of job opportunities available in the Urban League office. Any Urban League member or friend who has time to do volunteer work in the Industrial Office, and who can canvass job orders, will be very welcome.

There were 46 job applicants, 18 male and 28 females. There was a total of 17 referrals for 6 males and 11 females. There were six referrals for permanent full-time household employment. Although referral services were almost completely inactive for almost two weeks of December (because of would-be-applicants attention to Christmas and waiting until after New Year's to apply for work; and because most employers were "coasting" during this period) the problem continuously canvassing employers for job orders remains extremely important in this phase of our work.

Research: Final rounding-out of material on discrimination in employment, for the Montclair Forum. The Forum was a rather thorough audit of social conditions in Montclair with the Report of President's Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, as a background. The facts presented in Montclair gained widespread news coverage and attention. Our cooperation was limited to supplying needed information.

Work is being continued on the development of information on the current status of Negro workers in northern New Jersey. The mechanics of a survey have been set up but at this writing the questionnaire is being rewritten after consultation with the chairman of the Industrial Relations Committee. A new approach he advised is likely to give us infinitely better results as well as do a good job of public relations.